

A "Heart For" Series #4  
**An Open Heart**  
By Bill Denton

## Introduction

### A. Illustration

On Saturday, June 22, 2002, the scheduled game between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Chicago Cubs at Wrigley Field was cancelled because of an eerie discovery. The Card's ace pitcher was found dead in a Chicago hotel room. Thirty-three-year-old Darryl Kile, who wore number 57, had been a major league pitching sensation for 12 years and had appeared in three All-Star games.

At a recent team physical, the 6-foot 5-inch athlete seemed in excellent health. When the medical examiners conducted an autopsy later that day, they discovered that Kile had died from a massive heart attack. His main coronary artery was 90 percent blocked.

Darryl Kile appeared to be healthy, but his heart was diseased. Jesus reminded us that a person's appearance and behavior can be misleading. The Pharisees, for example, looked impressive, but their hearts were far from God.

*source: Daily Herald (6-24-02)*

### B. In recent years, medical science has learned a lot about heart disease

1. Advances in treatment now enables people to live much longer
2. We're constantly bombarded with messages about the danger of smoking, getting our cholesterol level within the right range, the importance of diet, vitamins, exercise – all designed to help us keep a healthy heart
3. What is surprising is that a lot of people have not made a similar application to their spiritual life – getting and keeping a healthy heart

### C. In recent weeks, we've been talking about the importance of the heart

1. We talked about our need to have a heart for peopel in general
2. We talked about having a heart for the lost
3. Last week, we talked about having a heart for God and his will
4. It's obvious that the condition of a person's heart determines both the direction of his life and what he or she will become

### D. I want to conclude this series today with one more look at the heart

1. I want to talk about having an open heart
2. By "open heart" I mean a heart that is soft, pliable, tender and responsive
  - a. I'm not talking about the physical heart that pumps blood, I'm talking about the spiritual heart, the inner person
  - b. an open heart is necessary to following Christ, being God's child

## I. The Problem Of A Closed Heart

A. Perhaps we would do well to use a common biblical expression to describe the problem – a hard heart

1. This is a good description of what we're talking about as the problem
  - a. a hard heart is one that is impenetrable, unfeeling, untouchable
  - b. it is as if a protective shield is installed within us that prevents anything from getting in – anything from God, that is
2. Hard hearts are always a problem from God's point of view

B. Some examples of hard hearts will illustrate the point

1. 2 Chronicles 36:11-13

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD. 13 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel. NASU

- a. Zedekiah was an evil man, but one of the ways Scripture expresses his problem is with the idea that he hardened his heart against God
- b. He did not want God to get through and change his ways

2. Matthew 19:8

8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. NASU

- a. when asked about Moses and decrees of divorce, Jesus explained that what Moses allowed was a concession to people with hard hearts
- b. the main issue in divorce is not laws or regulations that govern it, the main issue is that divorce is the result of people with hard hearts

3. Mark 3:1-5

1 He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. 2 They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3 He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" 4 And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. 5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

- a. what could possibly motivate people to use the good done by Jesus as the basis for accusations and condemnation?
- b. the answer is their hard hearts that grieved Jesus

C. A hard heart is as deadly, spiritually, as a diseased heart is physically

## II. Hard Hearts Are Dangerous Because Of The Nature Of The Heart

### A. Mark 7:14-23

14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 16 [" If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."] 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. 18 And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) 20 And He was saying, " That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." NASU

1. Sin and all the problems associated with it are heart problems
2. If you want to understand the human beings, you must know that evil and sinful behaviors are a result of what is inside us – they are spiritual problems

### 3. Illustration

Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line dividing good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart.

*Alexandr Solzhenitsyn*

### B. Luke 12:34

34 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. NASU

1. This little statement reveals a world of information about the heart
  - a. the heart is capable of recognizing, perhaps even placing value on things
  - b. the heart is inclined toward those things it values, so much so that if you want to understand your heart, you must understand what it is that you value
  - c. when you get a clear view of your treasures, you'll get a clear view of your heart
2. This is both a negative and a positive kind of thing
  - a. if we value wrong things, ungodly and unholy things, our hearts will be right there and they will destroy us
  - b. it is entirely possible to treasure godly, holy things, to treasure the kind of things that make our hearts strong and vibrant
  - c. but make no mistake, it is the nature of the heart that produces the result, whether good or bad

### C. 1 Samuel 16:7

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." NASU

1. We have always understood this passage to mean that God has a standard of judgment very different from ours – he looks at a person's heart
2. The reason God can have that standard is that only he can really see the heart and know what is in it
3. Two things are worth noting about God's ability to see our hearts
  - a. positive – God can judge the truth about us, even if others can't see it
  - b. negative – God can judge the truth, even if others can't see it
4. Our hearts are visible and readable to God

### D. Hard hearts are dangerous for these very reasons

1. A hard heart is fertile ground for all the vile and ungodly behaviors of human beings
2. A hard heart is the product of what it values or treasures
3. God sees and judges the heart because it is not hidden from him

## III. We Need Hearts Open To God

### A. David understood the great need for his heart to be right with God

1. Psalms 51:10  
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. NASU
  - a. this after his sin with Bathsheeba had caused him anguish of soul and great disappointment at failing God
  - b. this ought to be the plea of everyone of us who understand the problem of sin in our own lives
2. Psalms 51:17  
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. NASU
  - a. here is the "sacrifice" God has always wanted – much more than any thousands of animals or other any other thing we might offer
  - b. a broken and contrite heart is the best thing you could ever give
3. Psalms 139:23-24  
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. NASU

**B. It is this heart, able to be ripped open before God that has always found God's best and most cherished response**

1. Joel 2:12-13

12 "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; 13 And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil. NASU

2. "Rend your heart and not your garments"

a. it's amazing what we will sometimes do trying to make up for our sins – as if we can make some sort of sacrifice God will accept and things will be all better

b. the only thing God really wants of us is our hearts

**C. This is why the preaching of the gospel must reach people's hearts, or it never has it intended results**

1. Acts 2:37

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" NASU

2. Romans 10:8-9

8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART" – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; NASU

3. God as always called people to himself with this message: there's a problem with your heart, it's grown hard and cold, it has become unfeeling and unresponsive – open your heart and I will cleanse it and make you whole

**Conclusion**

**A. Today, hard hearts are as much a plague as ever, making us spiritually sick and weak**

1. Your heart may be hard, you may be resisting God, fighting every urge to repent of your sins, turn to God and seek forgiveness in Christ

2. You may shut your eyes and ears against every word God has spoken, doing all you can to ignore, or rebel – whatever you can do to keep God out

3. It's a losing fight all the way around – your stubborn, hard heart will kill you

**B. Invitation**